Sierra Popoluca

Sierra Popoluca, also known as **Soteapanec**, **Soteapan Zoque**, or **Highland Popoluca**, is a developing Mixe-Zoquean language of the Zoquean branch. [3] It has 35,050 speakers (INALI, 2009)[1] who live in the southern part of Veracruz, Mexico. Sierra Popoluca has two sister languages, Texistepec and Ayapanec, both of which are severely endangered. [4]

The word *popoluca* means "gibberish" in <u>Nahuatl</u>, and the name Sierra Popoluca comes from the language being labelled as such at the time of conquest. To avoid the derogatory connotations of *popoluca*, some researchers have adopted the name Soteapanec for the language instead (named after the largest municipality it is spoken in). However, modern speakers do not seem to be concerned with the history of the word and simply see it as the name of their language. [5] Natively, speakers refer to the language as $Nuntaj \pm yi$, which means "true word," and themselves as $Nundaj \pm ypapp \pm c$.

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Sierra Popoluca				
Soteapanec				
Nunt	aj ± yi			
Native to Mexico				
Region	Veracruz			
Native speakers	35,050 (INALI, 2009) ^[1]			
Language	Mixe–Zoquean			
family	Zoquean			
	GulfZoquean			
■ Sierra Popoluca				
	SierraPopoluca			
Official	Popoluca			
Official Regulated by	Popoluca			
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Distribution

Sierra Popoluca is spoken in the following municipalities:^[6]

- Soteapan
- Tatahuicapan
- Hueyapan de Ocampo

Other communities where it is spoken include Catemaco, Piedra Labrada, and Santa Rosa Cintepec. <u>Nahuatl</u> and <u>Spanish</u> are also spoken in nearby areas, and have influenced Sierra Popoluca through language contact. [7]

Phonology

Vowels

Sierra Popoluca has twelve vowel phonemes: six distinct <u>short vowels</u> (front vowels /i/ and / ϵ /, central vowels /9/ and /a/, and back vowels /u/ and / ϵ /) with a corresponding <u>long vowel</u> for each. [8]

Vowel Phonemes

	Front	Central-Back	Back
High	ii:		uuː
High-mid		:e e	
Mid	εε:		o o :
Low		a a ː	

Consonants

Sierra Popoluca's consonant inventory consists of thirteen consonants.^[8]

Consonant Phonemes

	Bilabial	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stop	р	t		k	?
Affricate		ts			
Fricative		s			h
Nasal	m	n		ŋ	
Approximant	w		j		
Unspecified segment					Н

Some words in Sierra Popoluca contain "an unspecified underlying segment, identified as the segment /H/."^[9] Depending on the environment it appears in, /H/ can alternate in three different ways, as described by the rules below:^[9]

/H/ Alternation Rules

- (1) $H \rightarrow : / V C$
- (2) H / V_#

In addition to its main consonant inventory, Sierra Popoluca also has a restricted phoneme inventory consisting of eleven consonants. These consonants are considered "restricted" because the only words they appear in are either <u>ideophones</u>, Spanish borrowings, or stylistic alterations.^[8]

Restricted Phonemes

	Bilabial	Alveolar	Alveo-palatal	Palatal	Velar
Stop	b	d	t ^j , d ^j		g
Affricate			t∫		
Fricative			ſ		
Nasal				'n	
Liquid		I			
Flap		٢			
Trill		r			

Syllable structure

Sierra Popoluca's syllabic template is (C)CV(1)(7)(C)(C). Words containing examples of each syllable structure are given in the table below: [10]

Syllables

Structure	Word	Translation
CV	[ku.ˈt ʲ uːm]	'alone'
CV:	[ˈkəːːeaˈ]	'firewood'
CVC	['pakʰ]	'bone'
CV:C	[ˈhuːtʲʰ]	'where'
CV?C	[ˈkaʔn.puˀ]	'egg'
CV?CC	[?a.'sɔ?ps.pa²]	'it tires me'
CCVC	[ˈtraj.t ʲ i ˀ]	'kid, adolescent male'
ccvcc	[ˈkruʔj.tʲiˀ]	'quail'

Sierra Popoluca has <u>phonotactic</u> restrictions on both onset and coda clusters. For onsets, only the clusters /tr/, /kr/, and /kw/ are allowed. For codas, all two consonant clusters must begin with one of /p, k, 7 /, and three consonant clusters are restricted to only 7 ps/ and 7 ks/. $^{[11]}$

Stress

There are three degrees of stress in Sierra Popoluca: primary stress (which may fall on the penultimate or ultimate syllable), secondary stress (which is assigned to the leftmost syllable that is not a clitic), and tertiary stress (which falls on the heaviest syllable preceding primary stress). Words containing examples of each stress paradigm are given in the table below:^[12]

Stress Paradigms

Paradigm	Word	Translation
Primary	nümné?	'He had said.'
Secondary	nùmne?yájpa	'They have said.'
Tertiary	nǜmmà?yyajtáabam	'They are told.'

Morphology

Sierra Popoluca is an <u>agglutinating</u>, <u>polysynthetic</u> language whose morpheme inventory is primarily inflectional and consists of roughly an equal number of clitics and suffixes, with no prefixes. The morphological processes reduplication and compounding are also observed in Sierra Popoluca. [13]

Sierra Popoluca has three major word classes: nouns, verbs, and adjectives. [13]

Suffixes

Sierra Popoluca has 28 suffixes, all of which can be categorized as either <u>derivational</u>, <u>inflectional</u>, or <u>valency</u> adjusting. Nouns only take derivational suffixes whereas verbs take suffixes from all three categories.^[14] Examples of each suffix type are given in the table below:

Suffix Examples

Suffix	Туре	Function	Word	Gloss	Translation
-i	Derivational	Nominalizer	wi?k-i	eat-NOM	'food' ^[15]
-ü	Inflectional	Imperative	koony-ü	sit-IMP	'sit' (command) ^[16]
- 7ü 7y	Derivational	Provisory	jawanh-?ü?y	fever-PROV	'have a fever' ^[17]
- 7iny	Inflectional	Optative	matonh-?iny	listen-OPT	'should listen' ^[16]
-taH	Valency adjusting	Passive	suy-taH	lasso-PASS	'be lassoed' ^[18]

Proclitics

There are 17 proclitics in Sierra Popoluca. Out of these, ten are used for person marking, three are used for valency adjusting, two are derivational, and the final two have other, unique functions. Verbs in Sierra Popoluca can take all proclitic types while nouns can take all but valency adjusting proclitics.^[19] Examples of various proclitics are given in the table below:

Proclitic Examples

Proclitic	Туре	Function	Word	Gloss	Translation
7an+	Person marking	1st person possessive, exclusive	?an+?ak?anh	1POSS:EXCL+griddle	'my griddle' ^[20]
7iga+	Other	Complementizer	?iga+Ø+teeny- W	COMP+3ABS+stand- CMP	'that [he] was standing up' ^[21]
tan+	Person marking	1st person ergative, inclusive	tan+juy	1ERG:INCL+buy	'we buy' ^[22]
7ak+	Valency adjusting	Causative	?ak+ku?t	CAUS+eat	'feed' ^[23]
?agi+	Other	Intensifier	?agi+wej	INTENS+cry	'cry a lot' ^[24]

Enclitics

Sierra Popoluca has nine enclitics, six of which are adverbial, two of which are inflectional, and one of which is a relativizer. Nouns can take all three types of enclitic whereas verbs can only take adverbial enclitics. Examples of each enclitic type are given in the table below:^[25]

Enclitic Examples

Enclitic	Туре	Function	Word	Gloss	Translation
+yaj	Inflectional	3rd/nonhuman plural	tza?+yaj	rock+NHPL	'rocks'
+tyi	Adverbial	"just"	yü?üm+tyi	here+just	'just over here'
+tam	Inflectional	1st/2nd human plural	yoomo+tam	woman+HPL	'women'
+pü 7k	Relativizer	Relativizer	tum puktuuku yagatz+pü?k	one cloth large+REL	'a cloth that's large'
+nam	Adverbial	"still"	tzüüxi+nam	small+still	'still small'

Reduplication

Reduplication of the root (full reduplication) is observed with both nouns and verbs in Sierra Popoluca, and can be inflectional or derivational. Though generally used to convey intensity or frequency, reduplication can also express "a sense of wandering around repeating an action" when paired with the ambulative suffix - 70 7y. Various examples of reduplication are given in the table below:

Reduplication Examples

Function	Word	Gloss	Translation
Derivational	looko~looko	sound~REDUP	'shout' ^[27]
Frequency, intensity	?a?m~?a?m	look~REDUP	'watch' ^[28]
Ambulative	monh~monh-?o?y	sleep~REDUP-AMBUL	'sleep from place to place'[28]
Frequency, intensity	was~was	bite~REDUP	'bite repeatedly' ^[29]
Intensity	?uk~?uk	drink~REDUP	'drink all' ^[29]

Compounding

Compounding is observed in all word classes in Sierra Popoluca and is highly productive.^[30] Various examples of compound words are given in the table below:

Compounding Examples

Structure	Word	Gloss	Translation
N=N	mok=yooya	corn=pig	'peccary' ^[30]
N=V	pooy=?ix	moon=see	'menstruate' ^[31]
N=N	tzuj-i=nü?	spit-NOM=water	'saliva' ^[30]
ADJ=N	müj=pak	big=bone	'waist' ^[32]
N=V	manük=wat	child=make	'impregnate' ^[31]

Syntax

Sierra Popoluca is an <u>ergative-absolutive</u>, <u>head-marking</u> language. At minimum, the basic clause can consist of just a predicate, as shown below:^[33]

?a+seet-pa 1ABS:EXCL+return-INC

'I return.'

At maximum, it can include an inflected complex predicate and up to three modified arguments: [33]

?an+jaatunh?i+ma?y=chi?-Wtunh.gak1poss:excl+father3erg+sell=give-complone.anotherpüüxinyje?m?an+yooyamanthat1poss:excl+pig

'My father sold another man my pig.'

Basic word order

Word order in Sierra Popoluca is pragmatically determined for the most part. In transitive sentences, all six possible word orders are attested, as shown below:^[34]

VSO

7okmü 7i+ma?y-W 7an+tüüwü

after 3erg+sell-compl 1poss:excl+brother

je?m potro that colt

'Afterward, my brother sold the mare.'

VOS

?i+?ix-Wka?npuje?m3ERG+see-COMPLeggthat

choomo nü?-kü?.mü grandmother water-at/during 'The old woman saw the egg in the water.'

SVO

je?m yoomo ?agi+?i+?a?m-W that woman ;nx+3erg+look-compl.

je?m tzu?ukiny that worm

'The woman looked intensely at the worm.'

SOV

jay=tzüüx+tyam+yaj woonyi+tyam ?i+mük.?ü?y.?a?y-yaj-pa boy=child+hpl+nhpl girls+hpl 3erg+lie.antip.ben-3pl-inc

'The boys cheat the girls.'

OVS

yü?p many=mok ?i+na+miny-W+?am this young=corn 3erg+ass+come-compl+lam

?in+mü?üt 2ERG+son.in.law

'Your son in law brought this corn.'

OSV

 $\begin{array}{ccc} \text{mich} & 2 \text{in+choomo} & \text{dya} \\ \text{2PRO} & \text{2poss+grandmother} & \text{NEG} \end{array}$

je?m+pü?k mi+toy-ta?m-pa that+REL 2ABS+love-1:2PL-JNC

'Your grandmother doesn't love you.'

In intransitive sentences, both possible word orders are attested:^[35]

SV

je?m toro tza?-kü?üm the bull stone-at/during

Ø+nu?k-pa
3abs+arrive-inc

'The bull arrives at the rock.'

VS

Ø+nu?k-W+?am je?m yoomo 3abs+arrive-compt-tam that woman

'The woman arrives.'

However, not all word orders are used with equal frequency; an analysis of over 4,000 clauses from various texts found the following distribution of word orders in transitive and intransitive sentences:^[36]

Distribution of Word Orders by Transitivity

Transitive Intransitive

Order	Frequency	Order	Frequency
SVO	72.37%	SV	34.86%
VSO	5.26%	VS	65.14%
VOS	7.89%		
ovs	6.58%		
OSV	2.63%		
SOV	5.26%		

Relative word order

In terms of relative word order, Sierra Popoluca exhibits some structural features common to VO (verb initial) languages and some common to OV (verb final) languages. A few examples of these structures are given below:^[37]

Possessor precedes possessum (common to OV languages)

diablo ?i+jos devil 3poss+hole

'devil's hole (hell)'

Auxiliary verb precedes main verb (common to VO languages)

püüxiny moj-W Ø+wej-i man begin- $\underline{\text{COMPL}}$ 3ABS+cry-DEP

'The man began to cry.'

Complementizer precedes complement clause (common to VO languages)

?i+?ix-W+tyi+?am?iga+?üchdya3ERG+see-COMPL+just+IAMCOMP+1PRONEG

?an+jo?y-ka?-W

1ERG:EXCL+be.angry-INSTR-COMPL

'He saw that I wasn't angry.'

Order of nominal modifiers

Nouns in Sierra Popoluca can be modified by determiners, adjectives, quantifiers, possessors, and relative clauses. [38] Whether a modifier precedes or follows the noun it is modifying depends on the modifier, as illustrated below:

Demonstratives precede the nouns they modify^[39]

?oy-ta?m-Wyü?pkootzükgo.and.return-1:2pt-comptthishill

'We went to these hills.'

Adjectives precede the nouns they modify^[40]

?i+na+miny-wüpuromuja3ERG+ASS+come-comptpurewet

kuy tree

'He brought pure wet wood.'

Relative clauses may either precede or follow the nouns they modify^[41]

je?m ?i+na+?ity-yaj-W Ø+müjtam+pü?k that 3erc+ass+be-3pl-compl 3abs+big+rel

tük house

'They have houses that are big.'

sü?üp na+miny-ü tuum now <u>ASS</u>+come-<u>IMP</u> one

puktuuku \emptyset +yagatz+pü?k cloth 3_{ABS} +long+ $_{REL}$

Recordings

■ Sierra Popoluca Collection of Lynda Boudreault (https://www.ailla.utexas.org/islandora/object/a illa%3A124386) from the Archive of the Indigenous Languages of Latin America. Contains 148 archival files, including audio recordings and transcripts from a wide range of genres.

Further reading

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^{&#}x27;Now, bring a cloth that's long.'

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